

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY
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S E C R E T STATE 296726

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 461 - DECEMBER 12, 1977
SECRET

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SECRET/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS
LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. ON THE EVE OF THE CAIRO CONFERENCE ISRAELIS SEEM TO
BE EXPERIENCING BOTH CONFUSION AND CONFIDENCE. THERE IS
CONFUSION BECAUSE NO ONE IS YET QUITE SURE WHAT SADAT IS
UP TO, HOW THE CONFERENCE IS GOING TO DEVELOP, AND WHAT
SADAT EXPECTS FROM IT. THE CONFIDENCE STEMS FROM A SENSE

THAT THINGS ARE GOING ABOUT AS WELL AS ISRAELIS COULD HAVE HOPED OR DREAMED.

2. THE RAPID PACE OF EVENTS HAS CREATED STRAINS WITHIN ISRAEL'S RULING COALITION. THE QUESTION OF THE FUTURE OF THE WEST BANK APPEARS PARTICULARLY DIVISIVE, AND PRESSURES ARE GROWING WITHIN THE COALITION FOR A MORE FLEXIBLE STANCE ON THIS ISSUE. THE EXTENT OF THESE PRESSURES HAS NOT COME FULLY TO LIGHT, BUT THEIR SERIOUSNESS CAN BE MEASURED BY THE REPEATED EFFORTS OF MINISTERS

BEGIN, EHRLICH, AND TAMIR, AMONG OTHERS, TO KEEP COALITION DOVES FROM PRESSING THE GOVERNMENT TOO HARD AT THIS "EARLY STAGE."

3. WITHIN THE COALITION, SIGNS OF DISCONTENT ARE NOW EMANATING FROM FOUR SOURCES:

(A) AGUDAT ISRAEL, A PREDOMINANTLY DOVISH PARTY WHICH DOES NOT REGARD ISRAELI RETENTION OF THE WEST BANK AS HAVING ANY RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE, HAS INDICATED ITS BELIEF THAT BEGIN SHOULD RISE TO AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY
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TO MAKE PEACE. KNESSET MEMBER ABRAMOWITZ HAS CALLED PUBLICLY FOR FLEXIBILITY. HAMODIA, HAS EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR A WILLINGNESS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS;

(B) YADIN'S DMC, A PREDOMINANTLY DOVISH PARTY WITH A STRONG HAWKISH ELEMENT, SHOWS SIGNS OF IMPATIENCE WITH BEGIN. KNESSET MEMBERS RUBINSTEIN AND VIRSHUBSKY, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, HAVE BEEN ORGANIZING A DOVISH BLOC AMONG THE COALITION PARTIES WHICH CUTS ACROSS PARTY LINES. YADIN HAS PUBLICLY STATED THE NECESSITY FOR WEST BANK CONCESSIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF REAL PEACE, AND HAS CALLED FOR A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE TERRITORIAL PRICE ISRAEL IS WILLING TO PAY FOR PEACE.

(C) THE NRP, BEGIN'S INDISPENSABLE COALITION PARTNER, IS ALSO EVINCING SIGNS THAT A REAL DEBATE IS TAKING PLACE WITHIN THE PARTY. ALTHOUGH THE NRP HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY HAWKISH ON THE TERRITORIAL ISSUE OVER THE PAST DECADE, THE LONG SUBMERGED DOVES WITHIN THE PARTY ARE NOW ASSERTING THEMSELVES. KNESSET MEMBERS GLASS AND MELAMED HAVE BEEN WORKING TO ORGANIZE A DOVISH BLOC WITHIN THE COALITION. GLASS HAS STATED PUBLICLY THAT HE WILL NOT HESITATE TO VIOLATE PARTY DISCIPLINE IN THE KNESSET IF PEACE IS AT STAKE. MELAMED, WHO IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE NRP'S VETERAN LEADER, INTERIOR MINISTER BURG, HAS STATED THAT HE WILL MAKE HIS VOICE HEARD WHEN THE MOMENT FOR DECISION ARRIVES. EVEN THE LEADER OF THE HAWKISH YOUTH FACTION, EDUCATION MINISTER

HAMMER, HAS BEEN MAKING UNUSUALLY MODERATE STATEMENTS
IN AN EFFORT TO CONTAIN DOVISH PRESSURE WITHIN THE NRP.

(D) THE LIKUD'S LIBERAL PARTY COMPONENT ALSO SHOWS
SIGNS OF DISCONTENT. OUTSPOKEN DOVE YOSEF TAMIR, A
MEMBER OF THE KNESSET, HAS CALLED FOR CONCESSIONS AND HAS
CRITICIZED BEGIN. WHILE OTHER LIBERALS ARE KEEPING QUIET,
A RECENT INFORMAL POLL SUGGESTS THAT SEVEN OF THE 15
SECRET

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LIBERAL MKS SUPPORT SOME TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS IN THE
WEST BANK IN RETURN FOR PEACE.

4. THE DEBATE WITHIN THE COALITION PARTIES WAS
INAUGURATED BY DAYAN. SHORTLY AFTER THE SADAT TRIP HE
CALLED UPON THE MINISTERS, PARTIES, AND PUBLIC TO RE-
EXAMINE THEIR POSITIONS AND DETERMINE HOW FAR THEY
WANTED TO GO IN MAKING CONCESSIONS. WHILE TRYING TO LEAD
ISRAELIS GENERALLY, AND BEGIN IN PARTICULAR, INTO RE-
EVALUATING THEIR POSITIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW
REALITY CREATED BY SADAT'S MOVES, DAYAN HAS SOUGHT TO
REAFFIRM HIS LOYALTY TO BEGIN BY OPPOSING CRITICISM OF
THE GOVERNMENT AND "COMPETITIVE CONCESSIONS." YET DAYAN
SEEMS TO REALIZE THAT HE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO CONTINUE
HIS OWN BALANCING ACT MUCH LONGER. (SECRET)

5. SYRIA: ASSAD CONTINUED TO SEARCH FOR SUPPORT IN HIS
DIFFERENCES WITH SADAT. HE CURRENTLY IS CONCLUDING A
TRIP TO THE GULF STATES. ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES
OF EMBASSY MANAMA, ASSAD IS MAKING THREE BASIC POINTS:

(A) SADAT'S ACTIONS IN GOING TO JERUSALEM, AND IN
BREAKING RELATIONS WITH SYRIA, HAVE RULED OUT THE
POSSIBILITY OF AN EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN DIALOGUE.

(B) ASSAD'S RELATION WITH THE SOVIETS, PARTICULARLY
HIS ARMS RELATIONSHIP, RULES OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF
CUTTING MOSCOW OUT OF THE PEACE PROCESS.

(C) ASSAD REMAINS COMMITTED TO THE PEACE PROCESS AND
WILL NOT STAND WITH THE REJECTIONISTS. (SECRET/NOFORN)

6. A SOURCE OF OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE IN DAMASCUS REPORTED
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THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN DAMASCUS BRIEFED HIS STAFF
AND HIS EASTERN EUROPEAN COLLEAGUES ON SOVIET VIEWS OF
THE SADAT INITIATIVE. THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR SAID THAT
IN THE KHADDAM-BREZHNEV MEETING IN MOSCOW, THE SOVIETS:

(A) SUPPORTED THE TRIPOLI CONFERENCE BUT ADVISED ASSAD NOT TO TAKE THE MOST EXTREME COURSE;

(B) FEEL THAT SADAT IS ACTING TOO HASTILY AND THAT THEIR PARTICIPATION IN A GENEVA CONFERENCE IS OF PARAMOUNT NATIONAL INTEREST TO THEM;

(C) PROMISED TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING IN MILITARY AID TO SYRIA. (CONFIDENTIAL/NOFORN)

7. EMBASSY DAMASCUS REPORTS THAT ATTACKS ON US POLICY IN THE SYRIAN MEDIA ARE BECOMING SHARPER AND MORE FREQUENT. NO LONGER ARE THE ATTACKS INDIRECT; EDITORIALS

AND COMMENTARIES ARE BEGINNING TO FOCUS ON THE US ROLE IN LIGHT OF RECENT STATEMENTS BY SENIOR US OFFICIALS. SENSITIVITY IS SHOWN TO STATEMENTS IMPLYING THAT THE US COMMITMENT TO GENEVA OR AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT IS SLIPPING. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

8. SADAT'S PEACE INITIATIVES HAVE THROWN THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT INTO CHAOS. SINCE THE RABAT SUMMIT, ARAFAT AND THE PLO HAVE BEEN NEARLY UNIVERSALLY VIEWED IN THE ARAB WORLD AS THE LEADERS OF THE PALESTINIANS AND THE RIGHTFUL NEGOTIATORS IN ANY SETTLEMENT. SADAT, HOWEVER, HAS SHATTERED THIS FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF, THEREBY THREATENING NOT ONLY ARAFAT'S LEADERSHIP BUT THE VERY LEGITIMACY OF THE PLO. ARAFAT IS BEING CHALLENGED FROM WITHIN THE PLO, BY REJECTIONISTS, AND BY OTHER PALESTINIANS WHO ARE SUPPORTED BY VARIOUS ARAB STATES.

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9. SADAT, BY DIRECTLY APPEALING TO THE WEST BANK AND GAZA PALESTINIANS, HAS CREATED A NEW POLITICAL SITUATION IN THOSE AREAS. WE HAVE INFORMATION FROM SEVERAL SOURCES THAT MOST PALESTINIANS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORY ARE FAVORABLE TO SADAT'S NEW APPROACH BUT WILL REMAIN PUBLICLY NON-COMMITTAL UNTIL THEY SEE WHAT THE TALKS CAN PRODUCE. HOWEVER, THE MAYORS OF THE MAJOR WEST BANK TOWNS, THE ONLY LEGITIMATE POPULARLY ELECTED LEADERSHIP, HAVE REMAINED--PUBLICLY AT LEAST--FIRMLY COMMITTED TO THE PLO.

10. OUTSIDE THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES ARAFAT IS FACING A SERIOUS CHALLENGE FROM THE REJECTIONISTS LED BY GEORGE HABBASH'S PFLP. THE RELATIVELY MODERATE PLO LEADERSHIP UNDER ARAFAT, THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO STATE THAT THEY WILL NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT WHICH RECOGNIZES ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST, ARE BEING CRITICIZED FOR BEING TOO CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH SADAT. THE HARD STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE PALESTINIANS AT THE TRIPOLI CONFERENCE WAS AN

ATTEMPT TO CREATE A UNITED PLO WHICH ADHERES TO REJECTIONIST POLICY.

11. ARAFAT'S GREATEST STRENGTH REMAINS HIS UNIQUE POSITION AS THE RECOGNIZED LEADER OF THE PLO. WHILE THE MOVEMENT IS BEING TORN BETWEEN THOSE WHO WISH TO REJECT ALL COMPROMISES WITH THE ISRAELIS AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE PALESTINIANS MUST BE MORE FORTHCOMING, ARAFAT WILL STRUGGLE TO HOLD THE MIDDLE GROUND. HE HAS DISASSOCIATED HIMSELF FROM BOTH EXTREMES, HAVING SALAH KHALAF SIGN THE TRIPOLI DECLARATION AND CRITICIZING THOSE PALESTINIANS WHO SUPPORT SADAT. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER,

HE IS ACTIVELY WORKING TO MAINTAIN CONTACTS WITH ALL
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PARTIES. HIS REPRESENTATIVES IN CAIRO ARE STRESSING HIS MODERATION AND HAVE ATTEMPTED TO JUSTIFY HIS ATTENDANCE AT THE TRIPOLI CONFERENCE. (HE HAS SUCCEEDED TO SOME EXTENT IN THAT THE PLO WAS THE ONLY PARTICIPANT AT TRIPOLI WHICH WAS ALLOWED TO MAINTAIN ITS OFFICE IN CAIRO.) ON THE OTHER HAND, PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT ARAFAT WILL VISIT IRAQ SHORTLY. (SECRET)

12. USSR: ACCORDING TO A SOURCE OF OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE IN DAMASCUS THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN DAMASCUS IS HAVING SECRET TALKS WITH SAUDI EMISSARIES. (SECRET/NOFORN)

13. CAIRO CONFERENCE: REUTER REPORTED THAT THE JERUSALEM POST SAID THAT THE CAIRO CONFERENCE MAY BE HELD IN TWO PHASES. THE FIRST WOULD BE MADE UP OF SENIOR EXPERTS AND THE SECOND WOULD BE HELD AFTER CHRISTMAS AT THE FOREIGN MINISTER LEVEL. THE TOPIC AT THE INITIAL STAGE WOULD BE THE NATURE OF PEACE WHILE THE TERRITORIAL ISSUE WOULD BE DEALT WITH IN THE SECOND ROUND, THE NEWSPAPER SAID. (UNCLASSIFIED)

14. IRAQ-TRIPOLI CONFERENCE: THE LEADER OF THE IRAQI DELEGATION TO THE TRIPOLI CONFERENCE PROVIDED A PUBLIC EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE. HE LAY THE PRIMARY BLAME FOR IRAQ'S WALKING OUT ON ASSAD WHO WOULD NOT RENOUNCE A PEACEFUL SOLUTION. HE ALSO BLAMED THE OTHERS WHO FOLLOWED THE SYRIAN LEAD. (UNCLASSIFIED)

15. SADAT: A QATARI NEWSPAPER QUOTED INFORMED EGYPTIAN SOURCES WHO SPECULATED THAT SADAT WILL TOUR THE GULF STATES FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF THE CAIRO PREPARATORY CONFERENCE. (UNCLASSIFIED)

16. EGYPT-ISRAEL: HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL MESHEL LEFT ISRAEL ON DECEMBER 8 TO ATTEND THE AFL-CIO CONVENTION IN LOS ANGELOS. PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE, ACCORDING TO

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"DAVAR," HE STRESSED THAT ONE OF HIS MAJOR
OBJECTIVES WILL BE TO MEET ARAB DELEGATES. (UNCLASSIFIED)
CHRISTOPHER

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